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AUTHOR Holman, Martha; Gailey, Lamar
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ABSTRACT

This module on pottery making is one of eight modules designed to provide instruction on authentic Blue Ridge Mountain crafts to adult basic education students at a low cost. Contents include notes on the history of pottery, including terms to know; process used, including equipment and materials, as well as method described narratively and graphically; and the followup, where the student is told how to progress to higher levels of proficiency. The Fry readability level of this module is 3.6. A teacher's guide which lists resources for each module in the series is available separately (see Note). (MEK)

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SHARING THE ARTS OF THE BLUE RIDGE MOUNTAINS

POTTERY

Conducted By:

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Lamar Gailey
Coordinator
Adult General Education

Martha Holman
Project Director
Special 309 Project

PREFACE

"Sharing the Arts of the Blue Ridge Mountains" is written so you, the AGE student, can learn about mountain arts. There are eight modules. Each module tells about the history of one art. Each module tells how to make a useful item the way mountain craftsmen do.

Crafts used to be a way of life for mountain families. People in the mountains were secluded. Families had to make everything they used. Later, city people wanted to buy these items. A crafts market developed. The mountain people found they could enjoy making things and have an income.

Today many people like to make items. It is a pleasure to make things. People still like to buy handmade items. Thus, there is still a market for items that are interesting to make.

In writing these modules, about 30 artists and craftsmen were interviewed. The craftsmen and artists shared the way they created their crafts. Project staff also visited Hambidge Center at Rabun Gap, Georgia; Berea in Kentucky; and Pi Beta Phi Arrowmont School, Gatlinburg, Tennessee. These schools are three of the ones which teach mountain arts and crafts. They were established to teach the mountain people some of the dying crafts in the early 1900's.

Today these schools, as well as John C. Campbell Folk School, Brasstown, North Carolina, and Penland Institute, Penland, North Carolina, have classes. Many vocational-technical schools also teach crafts. Junior colleges sometimes offer non-credit craft courses. The Cooperative Extension Service holds some craft classes. Later you may want to go to a class at one of these schools.

Bob Nichols of Helen, Georgia, did the art work for this project.

Mr. and Mrs. William L. Tribble were the special consultants for this module. This project could not have been written without their help. They decided on the best materials to be used for the pottery module. They then helped the project staff write the module. Their knowledge of mountain crafts, including pottery, helped guide this entire project.

If you want to learn more about the Blue Ridge Mountain area or pottery, your AGE teacher has a list of books and resources.

MR. AND MRS. WILLIAM TRIBBLE, Consultants

Mr. and Mrs. Tribble with pottery items they have made in their studio.

Mr. and Mrs. William L. Tribble, known as Trib and Jo, were born and raised in north Georgia. They lived in Florida several years. When they retired from the business world, they returned to north Georgia. They live in Helen.

The Tribble's have been involved in pottery making for a number of years. They have admired the varied types of pottery in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Thus, with great enthusiasm they joined the mountain craft trend. They make a wide variety of pottery pieces. They try to make each pot a little different. Each of their pottery pieces is individually hand made. They make items by pinching, slabbing, coiling or by "throwing" on the potter's wheel. They use native leaves, pine sprays and other mountain shrubs for decoration on their pottery.

The Tribble's live and work in a chalet surrounded by trees and birds. They have the feeling they are in a tree house. Thus, they call their pottery studio "Tribble's Tree House." Jo and Trib love working with clay in the surroundings of the Blue Ridge Mountains. They constantly strive to improve their pottery contributions to the world of the Blue Ridge crafts.

What is a pot
A pot is not
just any gray
little bowl of clay
A pot is a pot
for daffodils
or a porridge pot
or a pot for pills
cruets and goblets
jars and jugs
platters and plates
and trays and mugs
shallow pots
or dark and deep
pots to give
and pots to keep
touch them - hold them
pick them up
batter bowl
or saké cup
and feel the curve
of earth and sky
kitchen warm
or springtime shy
a pot is a mood
of many hues
but most of all
a pot to use.

Cynthia Bringle

POTTERY

I. ABOUT POTTERY

What is pottery? It is the art of making items from clay. When the items are made they must be fired. (This means heated until the clay gets hard.)

The clay that is used is natural bits of rock that have eroded over a long time and settled in one place. This forms the clay.

Pottery is an old craft. It is believed that clay was first used to line baskets. These baskets were used to hold small seeds and grains. The clay kept the small seeds from falling through the sides of the basket. An old basket probably was thrown into the fire and a piece of pottery was made. Some old pieces of pottery have been found. One piece is about 8000 years old. Some old pottery was found in Egypt. Old pottery from Iran had been made on a potter's wheel. This was made about 4000 B.C.

The types of clay objects have been about the same through the years. Bowls, cups, pots, jewelry were all made. The difference was in the design.

Pottery has been important to the Blue Ridge Mountain people. Cherokee Indians made simple gray pottery. They shaped their pieces by hand. Later the pots were dried in the sun. Then they were hardened in ovens. Some Indians used the fireboxes of their cook stoves.

There are still many potters in the Blue Ridge Mountain area. In north Georgia there are several well known potters. The Meaders' family has been making pottery for several generations. "Trib" and Jo Tribble are known for their unusual items. They sell their pottery in Atlanta, north Georgia, and North Carolina. George Counts has written

books on pottery. Phil Mayhew is known for his glazes.

Early potters usually dug their own clay. Clay was plentiful near their homes. When the potter got his clay,he put it in a box. Paddles were put in the box. The paddles were hooked to horses. The horses walked in circles. This mixed the clay.

Early potters built their own kilns (ovens) from bricks and clay. Some kilns were big enough to walk in. Fires were built inside to fire the clay. First there was a slow fire of poplar wood, then a hot fire of dry pine. The fire often got up to 3000 degrees.

Today most potters use electric or gas kilns. Some still use the old type kilns.

There are three basic types of clay. These are earthenware, stoneware, and porcelain.

Earthenware was the type most used by potters in the mountains. This clay only needs a low temperature to fire. Potters made churns, jugs, and everyday dishes from earthenware clay.

Stoneware is similar to earthenware. However, it makes a stronger item.

Porcelain is usually used for fine chinaware.

There are four ways to make a pottery piece.

1. There is the pinch method.
2. There is the coil method.
3. There is the slab method.
4. There is the wheel method.

The first three methods are done basically with the hands. The wheel method requires a potter's wheel.

This module is mostly on the pinch method. The slab method is discussed briefly.

This work should create a feel for clay. At the end of this project a person should know if the craft of pottery is for them.

WORDS TO KNOW:

Be familiar with these words related to pottery. You will need to know them if you read more about pottery.

biscuit or bisque fire - first firing, before glazing.

blowing - the bursting of pots in a kiln caused by temperature rising.

carving - method of decorating by cutting patterns on clay surfaces.

casting (or slip casting) - making clay objects by pouring slip into a mold. After hardening, the clay object is removed.

ceramic - the art and science of forming objects from earthy material then exposing the objects to high-heat treatment.

coiling - method of forming pottery by building up the walls with rope-like rolls of clay and then smoothing over the joints.

cones - ceramic objects used to check temperature in kilns.

earthenware - low-fire pottery (under 2000°F) usually red or tan in color.

firing - heating the clay object to the temperature needed to make it hard and permanent.

glaze - covering or coating put on a pot that seals the clay and gives the pot a shiny finish.

glaze fire - a firing at high temperature. The glaze materials will melt to form a glasslike surface coating.

greenware - pottery which has not been bisque fired.

kiln - the furnace or "oven" where pottery is placed to fire it.

leather hard - the condition of the pot when most of the moisture has left but it is still soft enough to be carved.

oxide - coating put on the clay that changes the color of the clay but not the texture.

pots - all items made from clay. This does not necessarily mean a "pot."

pottery - making items from clay.

shrinkage - contraction of the clay in either drying or firing.

slip - a clay mixed with water to the consistency of heavy cream--usually for decoration.

throwing - making pottery on a potter's wheel.

wedging - a method of cutting, beating, and kneading clay to expel the air. Wedging is very important. All clay should be wedged before using it.

II. HOW TO MAKE POTTERY

To make pottery little equipment is needed. The basic equipment is your hands. Set up a flat working space. A small kitchen knife, a wooden paddle and a rolling pin are needed. Also have a piece of wire or fishing line. Collect anything which will make a design. This can be old jewelry, cookie cutters, flowers, leaves, wood, etc. Have newspapers handy.

Small amounts of clay can probably be bought from a local potter or ceramist. If not, clay can be ordered from one of the places listed in the resources. Clay usually comes in 50 lb. bags. For this project we recommend that you use Lizella (Georgia Red) Clay. This can be ordered from Kickwheel Pottery and Supply in Atlanta, if it is not available locally. See resource list for full address. Later, try other types of clay. Keep the clay in a heavy plastic bag so it will stay moist.

Begin by wedging the clay. This is the process that gets air bubbles from the clay. It mixes the clay thoroughly. First, cut a good sized

piece of clay from the large hunk.
A strong nylon fishing line or wire is excellent for cutting. Use the wire to cut the small piece in half. (Figure 1) Turn the two halves slightly. Hit them together hard to make them one piece again. (Figure 2) Cut the clay in another place. Turn the clay slightly. Hit it together. (Figure 3) Do this several times. Pinch off a part of this clay. Put the rest back in the bag to keep it moist. Be sure to close the bag tightly.

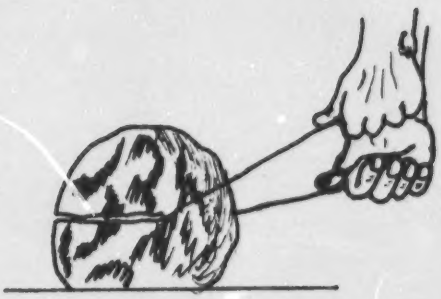

Figure 1

Now to begin with a pinch pot. This is the most basic way to make a pot.

Squeeze the chunk of clay. Roll it around between your hands. Make a ball smaller than your fist. It is better to have about a two-inch ball for the first try. If there are cracks or little wrinkles on the clay, smooth each one out with the thumb.
Hold the ball of clay in the left hand. Push the right thumb deep into the ball of clay. Do not go all the way through. (Figure 4) Be aware of how thick the clay is between the end of your thumb and your left hand. On the first try, leave

Figure 2

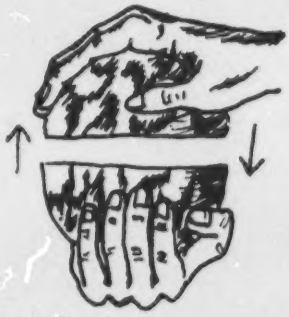

Figure 3

about a half inch of clay thickness at the end of the thumb.

Next, thin the clay on the sides. Start pinching the clay between the thumb and fingers of the right hand. (Figure 5) Do not pinch the clay too thin on the first pinch. Between pinches turn the ball of clay a little. The inside hole will get larger. The clay will get thinner between your thumb and fingers. Be careful that the pot does not get too big at the top. It can begin to look like a shallow bowl. Use pressure from your fingers to keep the rim turned in. (Figure 6)

The rim of the pot may start to get too dry. It will start to crack. If this happens, dip your fingers in water. Now, gently rub the rim with your wet fingers. Repeat the dipping and gentle rubbing. Continue until the rim is again moist. The cracks should be gone.

Do not try to get the walls too thin with the first pinch pot.

The walls of the pot can be made very thin with practice.

When you get a good shape, bang the bottom of the pot gently on a table.

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6

This makes a flat bottom. Do not worry about finger marks. These can make a nice pattern on the pot. Smooth the inside of the pot. Use fingers or a moist sponge.

Put the pot on a shelf for a few days. Do not dry your pot in the sun. Drying the clay too fast will crack the pot. If the air is very dry, place a damp cloth over the pot. This will slow down the drying. Wait until the pot looks and feels dry. It is now ready to be fired in a kiln.

Pinching makes it possible to make small and medium size pots. They can be pinched into lots of shapes.

More shapes are possible using a light wooden paddle. To make a paddle use a flat piece of smooth wood. It should be about one-quarter inch thick and ten inches long. Whittle a comfortable handle on one end. (Figure 7)

Figure 7

Pinch out another pot. When it is almost finished, try slowly turning the pot in your left hand. Paddle it with the right hand. (Figure 8) Don't hit too hard. It is possible to slowly paddle the pot into another shape. For instance, paddle against the rim of the

Figure 8

pot while turning it. This will turn the rim in and make the top opening smaller and smaller. (Figure 9) You can stop paddling and pinch some more. You can pinch and paddle, pinch and paddle. If the clay is moistened to smooth out cracks, let it dry well before paddling again. When finished, set the pot on a shelf to dry.

Figure 9

The pot can be changed in looks by adding texture to the outside. Try holding the pot in your left hand. Hit it gently with the sharp edge of your paddle. Try raking the clay lightly with the tines of a fork (the kind you eat with). Try pressing a heavy cord into the surface of the clay. Support the clay on the inside with the fingers. Try pressing dried queen anne's lace or other flowers or leaves into the clay. Try pressing an unopened pine cone into the clay. Look around. Try anything you think might making exciting marks in the clay.

Figure 10

If a pot is too big at the top, it can be made smaller by pleating. Fold the clay over into pleats. (Figure 10) Firmly press the pleats together. Six or eight pleats around the rim will reduce the mouth of

the pot. They will also make an interesting rim design.

A very nice effect can be to let the top crack. Paddle even more cracks into it. Cracks can be made longer by pinching the clay out longer between cracks. Then paddle smooth.

For another finish, mix a small amount of clay with water until it is like heavy cream. Now paint a design on the pot. This material made from clay and water is called slip.

Now to briefly discuss using clay slabs for building pots. Many kinds of pots, vases and other things can be made with slabs. Slabs of clay are made by using a rolling pin to roll a wad of clay out flat. Do this like biscuit dough. A piece of newspaper on a table makes a good surface for rolling slabs. Have several sheets of paper handy. It will get damp and tear. Roll out a slab about one-quarter of an inch thick. With the knife, cut a slab about six inches wide and ten inches long. Then set the slab up on one edge. Pull the two ends together while bending the slab into a circle. (Figure 11) Moisten one of the ends.

Figure 11

Push the two ends together. Make sure the ends are joined well. Use the fingers to work both sides of the seam. Do this until you cannot see the seam.

The clay is now in a tube. It is about six inches high and three inches across. Now, set this tube on another slab. With a sharp pointed kitchen knife, cut the slab around the tube. This makes a round bottom about 1/8-inch wider than the tube. Use the knife blade to pull the clay from the bottom up against the tube. Do this a little at a time. Go all around the tube. Keep working the clay and smoothing with an upward movement. The joint between the tube and bottom should no longer be seen. This makes a small vase. A paddle can be used to shape the top inward. The top can be bent to flare out. Designs can be made on it with the point of a pencil. Try pressing leaves and other things into the clay for designs.

Square slab shapes can also be made. Experiment! It will be surprising how many things can be done with a rolling pin to make slabs.

III. WHAT NEXT?

Many types of items can be made from clay. Some items are flower pots, bowls, dishes. Decorative pieces, bells, bird houses, cups and jewelry can also be made.

To learn more about pottery, you should go to a pottery class. Pottery classes are available in most communities. A number of local schools, vocational-technical schools, and individuals offer pottery classes. There are also many good books on this craft.

You might find also that you are interested in doing other forms of ceramic work. You can find out more about this at a local ceramic shop or from books in the library.

If you wish to experiment with clay type materials, try this craft clay. The recipe is given in the McCall's Book of Handicrafts.

1 cup argo cornstarch
2 cups baking soda (1 lb. box)
1½ cups water

Combine ingredients in a sauce pan. Cook over medium heat. Stir constantly until thick to dough-like consistency. Turn this out on a flat surface. Knead slightly. Cover with a damp cloth until cool.

Keep unused portion in aluminum foil. Make your item or design. Set it aside to dry. When dry, paint it. Your items can be glued on boxes, plaques, etc., if you wish.

You may also want to experiment painting the clay objects with Cold Enamel paint (one brand is Magnaflo by Magnus Craft Materials, Inc.) These can provide a colorful finish without glazing. After the pots have been fired, just paint your design on them.

Practice is the best way to learn about clay. You will learn to express feelings in clay. Clay can be what you want it to be.

If you are interested in reading about pottery, the adult education teacher has a list of books.

Places to get more information on pottery:

Adult education teacher.

Library.

Local potters.

Places to get supplies:

American Art Clay Company
4717 West 16th Street
Indianapolis, Indiana 46222

Burns Brick Company
Macon
Georgia 31200

L. H. Butcher Company
15th and Vermont Streets
San Francisco, California 94107

Cedar Heights Clay Company
50 Portsmouth Road
Oak Hill, Ohio 45656

Denver Fire Clay Company
P. O. Box 5507
Denver, Colorado 80217

Georgia Art Clay
Lizella
Georgia 31052

A. P. Green Fire Brick Co.
Mexico
Missouri 65265

V. R. Hood, Jr.
Box 1213
San Antonio, Texas 78206

House of Ceramics
1101 North Hollywood Street
Memphis, Tennessee 38100

Kickwheel Pottery and Supply
802 Miami Circle, NE
Atlanta, Georgia 30324

La Mo Refractory
323 Iris Avenue
New Orleans, Louisiana 70121

Monmouth Natural Stoneware
Monmouth
Illinois 61462

Nasco Arts & Crafts
901 Jonesville Avenue
Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin 53538

Newton Pottery Supply Company
Newton
Massachusetts 01432

Spinks Clay Company
Box 929
Paris, Tennessee 38242

Standard Ceramic Supply, Inc.
Box 4435
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15205

Trinity Ceramic Supply, Inc.
9016 Diplomacy Row
Dallas, Texas 75235

United Clay Mines
Trenton
New Jersey 80608

Western Ceramic Supply Company
1601 Howard Street
San Francisco, California 94103

Westwood Ceramic Supply Company
14400 Lomitas Drive
City of Industry, California 91744

Wilson's Pottery
Alto
Georgia 30510

Jack D. Wolfe, Inc.
724 Meeker Avenue
Brooklyn, New York 11222

Zanesville Stoneware Company
Zanesville
Ohio 43701